



Interview Summary: The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities

Background

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities. He has served as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) since 2018 and was appointed Minister of Infrastructure and Communities in 2021.

Minister LeBlanc was interviewed by Shantona Chaudhury, Yves Côté, Gordon Cameron, Dahlia Shuhaibar, Nusra Khan, and Alexandra Heine on September 9, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Ms. Chaudhury. Text contained in square brackets are explanatory notes provided by Commission counsel to assist the reader. Certain documents are referred to in the footnotes to assist the reader, but in many cases they were not shown to or discussed with Minister LeBlanc at the interview.

Two senior members of the IGA Secretariat of the Privy Council Office (“PCO”) were interviewed on August 31, 2022: Michael Vandergrift, Deputy Minister Intergovernmental Affairs and Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet for Plans and Consultations, and Louise Baird, Assistant Deputy Minister Intergovernmental Affairs (“DM Vandergrift” and “ADM Baird,” respectively). A separate interview summary has been prepared for that interview and should be read alongside this summary.

Involvement in the events of January and February 2022

Minister LeBlanc noted that he was involved in these events almost exclusively in his role as Minister of IGA. During this period, he worked very closely with, and was briefed by, DM Vandergrift and DM Vandergrift’s colleagues at PCO. He was in touch with his provincial and territorial (“PT”) counterparts.

Throughout the events of the Freedom Convoy protests and blockades, Minister LeBlanc saw his role as ensuring that his colleagues with operational responsibilities—primarily Ministers Marco Mendicino [Public Safety], Bill Blair [Emergency Preparedness], and Omar Alghabra [Transport]—were talking to their PT counterparts, especially in those areas where the situation was most complicated. There was the most interaction with counterparts in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba.

Minister LeBlanc explained that his role was a coordination function rather than managing operational relationships. He explained that in most provinces and territories, his PT counterpart is the Premier. An exception is Quebec, where his counterpart is the Honourable Sonia LeBel [the minister responsible for Canadian Relations and the Canadian Francophonie, among other dossiers], with whom he has developed a positive working relationship.



Minister LeBlanc added that he had no interaction with the City of Ottawa or Windsor because, constitutionally, cities are created by the provinces; the federal government's relationship is first and foremost with PT governments, although his colleagues had conversations with municipal authorities.

Interactions with PT counterparts prior to the FMM

Minister LeBlanc's interactions with PT counterparts are accurately set out in the *Report to the Houses of Parliament: Emergencies Act Consultations* ("Consultation Report"). [This report, which is required by s. 58 of the *Emergencies Act*, was tabled as part of the motion to confirm the declaration of an emergency and discusses a number of communications between federal and provincial officials.] He was asked to elaborate on some of these interactions.

Interactions with Premier Ford (Ontario)

Minister LeBlanc was asked about his engagements with Premier Doug Ford in January and February 2022. He noted that Premier Ford and his colleagues were less engaged on the file in the early days of the protest but that they became more engaged publicly and more engaged with the federal counterparts once the Ambassador Bridge was blocked, because of the economic damage that was being sustained in Southwestern Ontario.

[Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier Ford spoke on February 9.¹] Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not participate in that call. However, DM Vandergrift briefed him on the call afterwards. Minister LeBlanc was asked to follow up with Premier Ford, he believes by the Prime Minister's Office. Minister LeBlanc was told by PCO that there were significant authorities in the Ontario provincial transportation department that were not being used to the fullest extent and he was asked to encourage Premier Ford to get his transport department engaged. When Minister LeBlanc spoke to Premier Ford, it was in that context.

Minister LeBlanc spoke to Premier Ford the night of February 10.² During that call, Premier Ford indicated that he would be invoking Ontario's emergency legislation the next morning, that his office was preparing the declaration, and that he was prepared to use economic and regulatory instruments in relation to the Convoy. Premier Ford described different measures—fines, license suspensions, insurance measures, etc.—that his government was going to impose. They were focused on the situation in Windsor. He noted the economic damage flowing from the blockade of the Ambassador

¹ SSM.CAN.NSC.00002845_REL.0001 and SSM.CAN.NSC.00002843_REL.0001 contain readouts of this conversation.

² A readout of this conversation can be found in SSM.NSC.CAN.00000256, pp. 1-2.



Bridge. Premier Ford had spoken with automobile manufacturers and other business owners, unions, and the Governor of Michigan. Premier Ford also stated that the situation in Ottawa was unacceptable. He expressed the view that the municipal authorities in Ottawa (including the mayor, chief of police, and Ottawa Police Service) had been unsuccessful in addressing the situation. He spoke about the role the Ontario Provincial Police (“OPP”) was playing in Windsor and that the OPP was going to be much more engaged, take operational control, and deal with the lack of an operational plan in Ottawa.

Minister LeBlanc stated that the call was reassuring to the federal government given the steps that Ontario was going to take. When asked whether they discussed the possibility that the federal government might invoke the *Emergencies Act*, Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not recall doing so and that at that point in time, the subject had not yet come up in the Incident Response Group (“IRG”) meetings. [The IRG is the Cabinet committee chaired by the Prime Minister that met regularly from February 10 on to manage the file. The IRG serves as a dedicated forum in the event of a national crisis or during incidents elsewhere that have major implications for Canada. It is responsible for coordinating a prompt federal response to an incident, and making fast, effective decision. IRG is chaired by the Prime Minister and has no fixed membership: as a working group of Ministers, membership may consist of relevant Ministers, including Minister Blair, and senior government leadership, as needed, based on the nature of the incident. The IRG had its first meeting on February 10. It met again on February 12, 13, and 16, and every day thereafter until February 23.]

When asked about a note in an email indicating that he had spoken to Premier Ford on February 9,³ Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not recall having a phone conversation with Premier Ford that day and that it may have been a text message. His first phone conversation with Premier Ford about the situation was the call on February 10.

[Another document indicates that Minister LeBlanc sent Premier Ford “a note to acknowledge the importance of the steps taken” on February 10.⁴] Minister LeBlanc believes this is a reference to a text message in which he thanked the Premier for their call and said he appreciated what was being done with the provincial emergency legislation.

When asked whether he spoke to Premier Ford between their call on February 10 and the First Ministers’ Meeting (“FMM”) on February 14, Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not recall speaking on the phone but that they likely exchanged text messages. He was aware that Minister Mendicino was talking to Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones, and

³ SSM.CAN.00000086_REL.0001.

⁴ SSM.CAN.00000293_REL.0001.



his colleagues in Transport began to engage more actively with their Ontario counterparts.

Interactions with Premier Kenney (Alberta)

Minister LeBlanc stated that the first contact he had with Premier Jason Kenney was a text message [on February 11⁵]. Minister LeBlanc had seen in the media that the Government of Alberta was frustrated by its inability to find heavy tow truck operators willing to assist at Coutts and had made a request for assistance to the federal government for support. Premier Kenney had previously been Minister of National Defence and, according to Minister LeBlanc, he knew the process to request federal assistance and what assets the Department of National Defence would have.⁶ Premier Kenney knew there were military heavy lift tow trucks and wanted them to be available and used to address the situation at Coutts. Minister LeBlanc believes that Premier Kenney had spoken to Minister of National Defence Anita Anand or officials in her department about this as well.

Minister LeBlanc recalls telling Premier Kenney that there is a formal process for requests for assistance (“RFAs”), in which he is not involved but that he would speak to Minister Blair or Minister Anand.

Minister LeBlanc stated that he was not involved in the RFA approval process. However, he noted that sending a military tow truck to the circumstances in Coutts could have inflamed the situation. Further, he recalled that some of his colleagues had concerns about sending military equipment to Alberta because of the posture it sets and because it could be perceived as a similar situation to when the *War Measures Act* was invoked in 1970.

When asked whether he had discussed Alberta’s *Critical Infrastructure Defence Act* with Premier Kenney, Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not recall doing so. He recalls discussing tow trucks. Minister LeBlanc also recalled that Premier Kenney told him about the information he was receiving from RCMP commanders in Alberta around some of the intelligence information they were getting regarding violence and weapons at Coutts. Minister LeBlanc explained that as the RCMP acts as the provincial police force in Alberta, it briefs Premier Kenney directly.

⁵ This date was not mentioned in the interview, but Minister LeBlanc subsequently advised Commission counsel that the date of the first text message was February 11.

⁶ PB.CAN.00000718_REL.0001 is the request for assistance from Minister Ric McIver (Minister of Municipal Affairs) to Ministers Mendicino and Blair on February 5, 2022.



Interactions with Minister LeBel (Quebec)

Minister LeBlanc did not recall having any conversations with Minister LeBel prior to the FMM.

Interactions with Premier Horgan (British Columbia)

Minister LeBlanc spoke to Premier John Horgan on February 13.⁷ Minister LeBlanc noted that he sent Premier Horgan a text message because there was discussion about protests at the provincial legislature in Victoria and the blockade at the Pacific Highway border crossing was a concern. He told Premier Horgan that the federal government could assist as needed. However, Premier Horgan sent a reassuring message indicating that the protests at the provincial legislature in Victoria were less significant than they had feared, and BC did not request specific assistance.

Interactions with Premier Stefanson (Manitoba)

Minister LeBlanc did not recall having any discussions with Premier Heather Stefanson during the relevant time period.

Interactions with Atlantic premiers

Minister LeBlanc reached out to Premiers Tim Houston, Blaine Higgs, and Andrew Furey on February 12.⁸ He explained that he was aware from media reports that there was talk of sympathy protests and convoys in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as well as the border crossing at Woodstock, New Brunswick. He therefore reached out to these three premiers to ask whether they needed anything and to tell them that the federal government was available if they needed assistance. He was told that they did not require assistance. He recalled that Premier Higgs said the police in New Brunswick had done a good job from his perspective.

Interactions with territorial premiers

Minister LeBlanc did not recall having any conversations with the premiers of any of the territories prior to February 14.

⁷ SSM.CAN.00000293_REL.0001.

⁸ SSM.CAN.00000293_REL.0001.



Other interactions

Minister LeBlanc was asked about an exchange⁹ he had on February 6 with Ralph Goodale, the Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and former Liberal minister. [In the exchange, Mr. Goodale shared some views with Ministers LeBlanc and Mendicino about the handling of the protests in Ottawa compared to Toronto. Minister LeBlanc then wrote to Brian Clow, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, indicating that “[a]s requested, I had a long chat with Ralph yesterday.”]

Minister LeBlanc could not recall who exactly in the Prime Minister’s Office asked him to call Mr. Goodale but thought it was either Mr. Clow or Katie Telford, the Prime Minister’s Chief of Staff. He explained that Mr. Goodale has a great deal of experience, having served as a member of Parliament in the 1970s under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and later in various ministerial roles, including as Minister of Public Safety for four years in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s first government. It was therefore useful to obtain his views and political assessment of the situation in Ottawa (Windsor had not yet heated up at that time). Mr. Goodale expressed the view that there were various provincial authorities in Ontario that had not been engaged and that many members of the public had the mistaken belief that this was a federal responsibility.

The First Ministers’ Meeting on February 14

Minister LeBlanc explained that PCO brought the FMM on February 14 together. It served a coordination function rather than taking operational decisions or relationships.

Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not discuss the federal *Emergencies Act* with any of his PT counterparts prior to the FMM. He did not recall the *Emergencies Act* being discussed at any IRG meetings until the “two track scenario” started to be mentioned.

[In their interview, the IGA Secretariat panel members indicated that the FMM was organized the night before and that the email invitation contained no indication of the subject matter and did not attach any briefing materials.¹⁰] When asked about this, Minister LeBlanc recalled that DM Vandergrift said he would not put a subject line in the invitation because doing so may lead the FMM to become a public circumstance, which would not have been respectful to the premiers or conducive of a frank discussion.

Minister LeBlanc stated that his remarks at the FMM were very brief and more about process.¹¹ He noted that the Minister of Justice David Lametti provided the description

⁹ SSM.CAN.00006594_REL.0001.

¹⁰ See the interview summary of the IGA Secretariat panel at pp. 6-7.

¹¹ SSM.CAN.00000101_REL.0001 contains Minister LeBlanc’s remarks.



of the measures that would be invoked.¹² Minister LeBlanc noted that the Prime Minister deliberately wanted every premier to speak and that he was clear that the government had not yet made a decision. Minister LeBlanc said he believed this to be true, given that no decision had been announced at the end of the full Cabinet meeting the night before. He explained that Cabinet never votes; rather, the Prime Minister determines whether or not there is a consensus, decides what direction should be taken, and announces this to Cabinet.

The comments made by premiers in the FMM are captured in the meeting summary.¹³ Minister LeBlanc recalls that the FMM was scheduled for an hour but ran a little over time. He believes there was a meeting with the Liberal caucus in the afternoon of February 14, although he was not certain of the timing.

Interactions with PT counterparts between the FMM and the invocation of the Emergencies Act

[The Consultation Report indicates that Minister LeBlanc communicated with Minister LeBel between the FMM and the invocation of the *Emergencies Act*.¹⁴] When asked about this communication, Minister LeBlanc noted that at the FMM, Quebec Premier François Legault's reaction to the potential invocation of the *Emergencies Act* was among the most negative. He recalled that Premier Legault was particularly concerned that the RCMP could supplant provincial or municipal authorities. Minister LeBlanc suspects that the invocation of the *War Measures Act* in 1970 contributed to misperceptions about the implications of invoking the *Emergencies Act*, which replaced it. He noted that the Prime Minister and Minister Lametti were clear at the FMM that the RCMP would not be supplanting provincial authorities.

Following the FMM, Minister LeBlanc spoke to Minister LeBel and reassured her that the federal government was not supplanting Quebec's provincial authorities. He noted that Quebec had dealt with Convoy protests very effectively: there were not the same issues at Quebec border crossings as there were elsewhere. Minister LeBel did not understand why the *Emergencies Act* could not be limited geographically and exclude Quebec. Minister LeBlanc explained that his understanding was that the provisions in the *Emergency Economic Measures Order* ("EEMO") relating to the freezing of accounts needed to apply nationally and that from the federal government's perspective, that was the only obvious aspect of the emergency orders that would apply in Quebec. He explained that financial institutions in Quebec needed to be covered so that Quebec would not become a safe haven of bank accounts funding the convoy.

¹² SSM.CAN.00000099 contains Minister Lametti's remarks.

¹³ SSM.NSC.CAN.00000625.

¹⁴ Consultation Report, p. 7.



Minister LeBlanc recalled that Minister LeBel was interested in this information and agreed that it made sense. She stated that it would be helpful if Minister Lametti spoke to his provincial counterpart, Minister Simon Jolin-Barette, immediately. Minister LeBlanc believes that this conversation took place.

[The Consultation Report also indicates that the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Quebec Lieutenant) spoke to Quebec's Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety (Geneviève Guilbault).¹⁵] Minister LeBlanc explained that while he maintains contact with Minister LeBel as Minister of IGA, Minister Rodriguez also plays an IGA-type role with Quebec in his role as Quebec Lieutenant. Minister Rodriguez maintains contact with Minister LeBel but also others such as Quebec's minister of finance. Minister LeBlanc added that Quebec is the only province with a "lieutenant", although there had been, in the past, regional ministers for other provinces. When asked about Minister Rodriguez's contact with Minister Guilbault on February 14, Minister LeBlanc stated that he was aware of the conversation but did not know what they talked about.

[The Consultation Report also indicates that Minister LeBlanc communicated with Premier Ford between the FMM and the invocation of the Act.¹⁶] Minister LeBlanc believes this is a reference to a text message Premier Ford sent him following the FMM. He recalls telling Premier Ford that he appreciated his clear support for the invocation of the *Emergencies Act* at the FMM. He added that, in his view, Premier Ford's clear, unequivocal, and public support¹⁷ was very significant given that the vast majority of economic and social public order disruption was occurring in Ontario.

[The Consultation Report notes that the Office of the Prime Minister spoke with the Office of the Premier of Ontario between the FMM and the invocation of the Act.¹⁸] When asked about this communication, Minister LeBlanc stated that he had no information about it but that it is common for the respective chiefs of staff to communicate in acute moments like these.

Invocation of the *Emergencies Act*

Minister LeBlanc explained that the process of invoking the *Emergencies Act* requires actions by the Prime Minister and three ministers; the Clerk of the Privy Council is also involved. When asked when the Prime Minister made the decision to invoke the

¹⁵ Consultation Report, p. 7.

¹⁶ Consultation Report, p. 7.

¹⁷ SSM.NSC.CAN.00000625, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ Consultations Report, p. 8.



Emergencies Act, Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not know. He noted that the Prime Minister had heard from everyone, including Cabinet colleagues and PT premiers, and clearly gave instructions to proceed, but he could not say the precise moment after the FMM call ended that the Prime Minister gave the instructions.

Minister LeBlanc was asked whether he heard from his PT counterparts following the invocation of the Act. He stated that he did not receive any angry phone calls but did hear about some confusion about the national impact of the Act. For example, he recalled that Premier Higgs texted him to ask what the invocation of the Act in New Brunswick meant, to which he responded that operationally there would be little impact other than the financial aspects. He recalled that Premier Higgs stated it was important for people to understand that the RCMP would not be occupying the streets of Fredericton—again a reference to the 1970 invocation of the *War Measures Act*. Minister LeBlanc also spoke to Prince Edward Island Premier Dennis King to reassure him that he would see no operational impact in PEI and that only the financial measures were likely to have an effect there. When asked whether he spoke to Premier Kenney following the invocation of the Act, Minister LeBlanc stated that he did not recall doing so.

Minister LeBlanc was asked whether, in any of his contacts with PT counterparts, the premiers asked whether the financial provisions in the *EEMO* could apply nationally while other measures could be limited provincially. Minister LeBlanc stated that Minister Lametti was leading the conversations on the specific regulation and order under the Act and that the Deputy Minister of Justice, François Daigle, was also speaking to PT counterparts. He added that he believes the declaration of the emergency had to apply broadly in case certain publicly reported circumstances occurred: for example, there were reports that a convoy might block the ferry that transports critical supplies (including medical supplies) to Newfoundland.

Revocation of the Emergencies Act

Minister LeBlanc was asked about the process of revoking the *Emergencies Act*. He stated that at the IRG meetings after invocation, senior officials or ministers would provide updates about the situation on the ground. Once the demonstrations in Ottawa were largely dismantled, they discussed reports about the potential for sympathy protests elsewhere in the country. He noted that the Prime Minister was insistent both at Cabinet meetings and in public that the measures would be very time limited and would be revoked as soon as the situation permitted.